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Hotels of the future

Our Travel correspondent Joana Richards reports about a new trend in hotels.

I recently visited a hotel in France which has no visible human staff. This is just one of several hotels in Europe and Asia which runs with apparently no human contact. Most of the services are provided by robots and machines. The concept is to provide an environmentally friendly hotel where staff and running costs kept to a minimum. Personally, I've spent my life away from robots and machines, and so kept having to remind myself that in many parts of the world, its not unusual for jobs and household tasks to be automated these days.

So I lost no time in booking myself a room at one of these hotels and going to see it for myself. And sure enough, there are the reception desk instead of a friendly receptionist wearing a uniform was a machine.

'I'd like to check in please, I shouted, wondering if the machine would respond to my voice, and feeling thrilled that I was about to have my first ever conversation with a check-in machine. Nothing. I said it again but there was silence. I was hoping the machine would say something like 'If you want to check in, press 1. But then I noticed a written message in the machine's screen. 'Please insert your credit card and key in your booking reference, then follow the instructions.' No conversation. How disappointing.

Staying at the hotel costs from €35 (more if you want a bigger room). That's a bargain for Paris, where a stay in a more conventional hotel can easily cost two or three times that much. And if you did stay there, it wouldn't necessarily be any nicer, and certainly wouldn't be any more memorable. The hotel is located near to the amusement park, Disneyland Paris, which was created as a visitor attraction on the east of the city with lots of amusement rides. In fact, many of the guests book the hotel purely in order to be close to the park.

Back in the hotel, as well as machines to check in, there are vending machines to serve drinks and snacks and vacuum cleaners that work without a human, using sensors to navigate around the rooms. According to the owners, the laundry has robots which do all the washing unaided. Another innovation is the use of face recognition instead of keys to get into your room. A photograph of the guest's face is taken at the reception desk by the check in machines.

With 60 rooms in the building, there is a lot of coming and going. Guests are actively encouraged to stop and get a coffee from one of the machines in the guest lounge with other guests, so there is at least some social interaction. One area where humans are absolutely essential for the hotel is security. There are scanners and CCTV cameras everywhere, and the footage from these is watched by human security guards, no matter whether or not the hotel is full. It is their job to make sure that the guests are safe – and that no-one causes any damage to hotel property, including of course making off with a costly robot.

Critics say that businesses like these automated hotels will mean that people lose their jobs, as more and more roles can be performed by robots and machines. But there are many who see them as a vision of the future and argue that robots can make our lives easier. But this can only happen if higher manufacturing and (*line x*) operating standards are achieved, and if guests are prepared to put their trust in machines and don't mind the lack of personal contact. Only then will this type of hotel be a success. Time will tell if this is the case.

1 The aim of this hotel is to be very

- **A** efficient.
- **B** friendly.
- **C** profitable.
- **D** unusual.

2 What aspect of the writer's experience at reception was 'disappointing' (line X)?

- **A** the appearance of the reception
- **B** the time she wasted checking in

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C the lack of verbal interaction with the machine
D the rudeness of the other guests

3 What does the writer say about the price of the rooms in the hotel?
A The hotel is good value.
B The prices are likely to rise.
C Other hotels provide better accommodation.
D It is not always clear how much a room will cost.

4 What is the writer's main point in the fourth paragraph?
A There are limits to what robots and machines can do.
B Robots and machines can learn a wide range of skills.
C Different robots and machines are used for different tasks.
D Humans make mistakes that robots and machines do not make.

5 What risk is mentioned in the fifth paragraph?
A robots being stolen
B security guards being ineffective
C the hotel not doing enough business
D areas of the hotel becoming too crowded

6 What does 'this can only happen' in line X refer to?
A more roles being performed by robots and machines
B many seeing the hotel as a vision of the future
C robots and machines making our lives easier
D reduction in social human contact

Making mountaineering history

At the beginning of April, just a few weeks before his 17th birthday, George Atkinson arrived in Kathmandu in Nepal. The schoolboy from London was about to begin the final stage of his quest to become the youngest person to climb the highest peak on each of the world's seven continents. (1)…… It was just Mount Everest to go – the mightiest of the lot.

As an 11-year-old, George had been with his father on an organised trip up Mount Kilimanjaro, Africa's highest mountain. But George's dad got a stomach bug before the final ascent to the peak. 'I felt very weak and dehydrated', he said, and had to go back down. (2)…… And as George continued to the top with the rest of the group, his father endured an anxious wait. 'Seeing him coming back down again was indescribable.'

The next few years saw George build up his mountaineering skills and his fitness to prepare for his epic challenge. He spent his weekends carrying a heavily laden 80-litre backpack and walking from the family home to Richmond Park in London, which he'd then complete two full circuits of, making a round trip of 30 kilometres.

At 29,029 feet, Everest is over 6,500 feet higher than any of the other mountains on George's list. He knew it would be a challenge and was aware of the risks that being at such high altitudes carries, but he wanted to stand on top of the world. On checking in to the Hotel Everest View, at 12,729 feet, he got a glimpse of Mount Everest, and imagined looking back down to the hotel from the peak. He phoned his mother, Penny, and spoke to her. (3)…… And she knew just how much this climb meant to him.

But as they got closer to the summit, the weather turned bad. There were nervous moments for George and his group as they waited to see if the weather would improve and the wind would drop to a safer speed of below 30 miles an hour. George didn't know how long he might have to wait for another opportunity. (4)…… An American climber, Jordan Romero, who was two months younger than George, only needed to scale Vinson Massif in Antarctica to complete his set of seven.

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But eventually they made it, and George achieved his dream. But there was hardly time to celebrate on the peak. (5)…… By the time they got back down to the bottom, George and the rest of his group were all exhausted.
George intends to keep climbing and carry on with his studies. He says he is looking forward to life getting back to normal. And he's planning another mountaineering trip with his dad, this time up Mont Blanc in France. But the question is, will the elder Atkinson make it all the way up to the top this time? (6)……

A 'I've seen it,' he said, 'and it's huge.'

B He had already conquered all but one.

C But he knew he still needed more practice.

D 'I hope so,' he says, 'George is going to carry my stuff.'

E But George knew what he wanted: he was going to carry on.

F And by then, someone else might have snatched the record.

G Almost immediately, they had to begin an exhausting, non-stop 20-hour descent.

Vera Neumann: fabric designer

Vera Neumann was a designer and businesswoman whose products (1)…… their way into the homes of people across the USA.
Vera was born in Connecticut in 1907 and showed artistic (2)…… from an early age. After attending art college in New York, she got a job as a textile designer, but didn't like being (3)…… what to do. Determined to develop her own styles, Vera started to produce tablecloths each item printed by hand in her kitchen.
But it was her scarves that (4)…… Vera's name. Good fabric was in short (5)…… during the Second World War, but Vera was lucky enough to (6)…… across some silk left over from the manufacture of parachutes. Vera used it to design scarves with floral, abstract and geometric designs. These were an (7)…… success when they appeared in department stores and during the 1950s they were the (8)…… of fashion, being worn by celebrities such as the film star Marilyn Monroe. By 1960, the company which Vera had (9)…… was employing 200 staff and producing 130 patterns per season.

1	A found	B arrived	C fetched	D reached
2	A training	B talent	C expert	D gift
3	A led	B directed	C told	D forced
4	A got	B did	C gained	D made
5	A supply	B availability	C quantity	D delivery
6	A fall	B come	C happen	D run
7	A acute	B urgent	C instant	D extreme

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8 A height B peak C top D crown

9 A worked out B put on C carried off D set up

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